MANAGING STUDENT GROUPS

CETLA Guest Lecture Series

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MANAGING STUDENT GROUPS

- Challenges
- Strategies
- Assessment
- Benefits
### Challenges and Benefits to Group Work

#### Student Survey

**Informal**

#### Challenges
- Tendency for group members to slack off. (lazy people)
- Low group meeting attendance.
- Group may suffer if all members don’t do their part.
- Difficulty in getting everyone on one accord.
- Conflict may arise.
- Conflicting schedules.
- Conflicting ideas.
- Variance in work ethics.
- Unfamiliarity with colleagues.
- One person may take over/Autocratic.
- Distribution of workload (work not always distributed evenly.
- Accountability.

#### Benefits
- Work is distributed evenly.
- Mutual agreements, collaboration.
- Enhancing the creativity of others.
- Balance of weaknesses and strengths between group members.
- Ability to choose roles.
- Sharing of ideas.
- Cooperation and time management
- Skills are improved.
- Efficiency.
- “Forced” to manage conflict
- Meeting new people.
- Learning different perspectives.
- Cover more material.
- Adds character to presentation.
- Exposure to teamwork.
CHALLENGES

- Appropriateness of group activity.
- Unequal contribution within groups.
- Student preference for individual assessment.
- Balance and mix of necessary skills for each group.
- Maintenance of cohesive and supportive group climate.
CHALLENGES: The Issues We Must Address

- Decision to require student group projects.
- Constructing “appropriate” groups.
- Preparing students for working in groups.
- Monitoring group process and progress.
- Assessing student learning.
- Evaluating the group process.
STUDENT GROUPS
COMMON PROBLEMS

- One or two vocal individuals often dominate the discussion.
- Group frequently has difficulty staying focused on the assigned task.
- Group presentations can sometimes fall flat.

CHARACTERIZATION OF CHALLENGES and ISSUES

The majority of challenges and issues associated with managing group assignments can be summed into two categories:

- Need for ensuring group cohesiveness.
- Need for design of effective group assignments.
Impact of Task Characteristics on Team Development and Social Loafing

- Helps Team Development/Decreases Social Loafing
  - High individual accountability
  - Tasks require interaction
  - External comparison/feedback
  - Rewards for group work

- Hinders Team Development/Promotes Social Loafing
  - Low individual accountability
  - Tasks readily divided-up
  - Little/no comparison/feedback
  - Rewards for individual effort

Forces that Promote Social Loafing
(Uneven Contributions in Group Discussions)

- Some individuals naturally resist participation (shyness).
- Some individuals prefer to dominate discussions.
- Members may believe they lack the content knowledge required for making a meaningful contribution.
- Members may be concerned about appearing to be disagreeable or overly aggressive.*
- Members may not be committed to the success of the group.*
- The task may be inappropriate for groups because it:
  - can be completed by one or two members working alone.
  - does not require members to reach an agreement.

* These are especially important problems with new groups.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GROUP COHESIVENESS

- **Ensure “individual” accountability**
  
  ...design assignments prompting input from all members, yet require group presentation

- **Motivate intensive group interaction**
  
  ...build discussions into your design ...avoid assignments that foster independent work that an be pieced together ...give decision-based analysis or problem-solving assignments on complex issues

- **Facilitate external performance feedback**
  
  ...provide immediate, clear, and meaningful feedback (group comparisons, classmate assessments, criteria-based critique)

- **Reward “group” success meaningfully**
  
  ...include group pay-offs (i.e., group performance as portion of grading) ...provide social validation (i.e., peer group challenge and scrutiny)
TYPES OF INEFFECTIVE GROUP MEMBERS

- Monopolizer
- Silent member
- Saboteur
- Habitual joker
- Know-it-all

Source: Edge Hill University. Seven Steps to Working in a Group. Available at: http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/tld/student/7steps/groups.htm
ENSURING THAT ALL GROUP MEMBERS DO THEIR SHARE

- Delegate Various Responsibilities
  - Be sure everyone approves what will be passed in. Everyone needs to read and critique each draft.
  - Be sure tasks are broken down equally.
  - Schedule planning meetings.

- Divide Written Tasks
  - Discuss organization before writing.
  - Plan to write the introduction, conclusion, and transitions between sections as a group to help the text "flow."
  - Edit/revise the draft for coherence.

Source: Colorado State University. Writing the Paper Together. Available at: http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/processes/group/index.cfm
ENSURING THAT ALL GROUP MEMBERS DO THEIR SHARE (continued)

- Monitor The Group
  - Encourage the group to monitor itself.
  - Keep track of who speaks and when to ensure that all members have equal opportunities to speak.
  - Discuss problems with the entire group.

Source: Colorado State University. Writing the Paper Together. Available at: http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/processes/group/index.cfm
CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE GROUP MEMBERS

- Dependable
- Flexible
- Communicative
- Project oriented
- Considerate
- Positive

Source: Working in Groups. Available at: http://www.humboldt.edu/~jgv1/319Web/groups.html
STEPS TO WORKING IN A GROUP

■ **Step One - Getting Started**
  - Get to know the other group members.
  - Set some basic ground rules for the group.
  - Clarify the purpose of the group.

■ **Step Two - Organizing/Planning the Group**
  - Identify the key stages needed to complete the overall task
  - Set target dates for the completion of the stages
  - Agree when you will review the progress of the group
  - Identify the end product/outcome

Source: Edge Hill University. Seven Steps to Working in a Group. Available at: http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/lid/student/7steps/groups.htm
STEPS TO WORKING IN A GROUP (continued)

- **Step Three - Skills for Working in Groups**
  - Communication skills
  - Observation skills
  - Self-discipline skills
  - Self-awareness

- **Step Four – Leadership in Groups**
  - Organizing the group
  - Encouraging the group
  - Managing group dynamics
  - Disciplining the group
  - Setting an example

Source: Edge Hill University. Seven Steps to Working in a Group. Available at: http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/tld/student/7steps/groups.htm
STEPS TO WORKING IN A GROUP (continued)

- Step Five - The Group Process
  - Forming
  - Storming
  - Norming
  - Performing

Source: Edge Hill University. Seven Steps to Working in a Group. Available at: http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/tld/student/7steps/groups.htm
PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING INTRA-GROUP CONFLICT

- Welcome Differences
- React Positively
- Use Empathy
- Use Positive Feedback
- Confront Problems
- Negotiate Solutions Together

INEFFECTIVE/EFFECTIVE GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

Phrase assignments to promote the use of higher-level cognitive skills via three primary assignment alternatives:

- Listing or enumerating concepts (low-level cognitive skills).
- Making a choice (requires critical analysis).
- Making a specific choice (most demanding cognitively).
STRATEGIES
Effective Group Assignments

Create assignments that facilitate inter-group comparisons requiring:

- **Group** to make a choice or decision.
- **Time constraints** for presentations.
- **Q & A session** for each group (time limited).
STRATEGIES
Effective Group Assignments

- Monitor group process and progress according to group management criteria
  - prior to and during within-group activity (group development)
  - group content and delivery
  - feedback used to evaluate or design assignments

- Use “Energy” as the acid test for effective group activity
  - Ask yourself “How can I change this assignment so that it will increase group cohesiveness?”
  - Observe if the group presentation incites the energy level of the class as a whole

ASSESSMENT
USEFUL APPROACHES

- **Student Performance**

  ...daily or weekly journaling by individuals (periodically reviewed) with reflections on team formation and processing, contributions, and conflicts

  ...mid-point and concluding team memos on the group’s experience with reflections on lessons learned; observations and opinions on the group learning method as individually experienced

  ...grading system generally at group level (individual as appropriate)

  ...expected outcomes: improved understanding of the course material because of the interaction; appreciation for need to listen and to express ideas; and the experience and opportunity of the evolution of a supportive group climate
ASSESSMENT
USEFUL APPROACHES

- Design of Group Learning Experience

  ...student feedback allows timely surfacing and address of group issues

  ...written assignment (ungraded) used as an evaluation instrument

  ...cover questions on the general and/or specific nature of the assignments, group culture and climate; instructor’s role, comparison to other group experiences and learning formats
## Group Evaluation Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Members: ________________________________________________</th>
<th>Evaluator: ________________________________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject:______________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Group Presentation Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Performance Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~ Gain audience's attention.</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Communicates thesis/specific purpose.</td>
<td>Satisfactory 4-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Provides appropriate and credible supporting material.</td>
<td>Excellent 8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Appeared Well-Researched.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Convincing/Persuasive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Use of Visual or Audio Aid and Reference cited.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Use of visual/audio aid by each individual–able to see clearly, appropriate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Use of Power Point by Group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Uses transitions that support the organizational pattern.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Flow of transitions between speakers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Uses professional language, appropriate for audience and purpose;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Uses vocal variety to heighten and maintain interest, expressive vocals, speak at a good pace for subject matter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Nonverbals: Uses physical behaviors that support and do not distract from the message, good eye contact, appropriate use of gestures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Energy level high, expressive, dynamic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Dress – professional or relevant to speech topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Teamwork. Works well together, references material from each other.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ Achieves closure - Summarizes clearly, memorably, provides a clear sense of closure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total score: ____________

Comments: ________________
BENEFITS

- Students learn better when they learn together.
- Students working together maximize both their own learning and that of the other group members.
- Potential for developing essential teamwork, communication and leadership skills.
- Workload for instructors can be somewhat decreased with group presentations.

What are some additional benefits?
REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


THANK YOU